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DE RUEHBU #1434/01 2941202
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 201202Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2268
INFO RUCNMER/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 001434

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: LA RIOJA GOVERNOR WELCOMES U.S.
INVESTMENT

REF: BUENOS AIRES 1401 AND 1380

¶1. (SBU) Summary: La Rioja Governor and Peronist party member Luis Beder Herrera described his rural province's economy and expressed hope for U.S. investment in the mining area. The Governor asked about U.S. relations with Argentina, and the Ambassador highlighted strong cooperation in a wide range of initiatives, but noted relations have been somewhat strained by the ongoing "Valijagate" trial in Miami (reftels). The Ambassador also highlighted the availability of U.S. training programs and seminars in which legal and law enforcement professionals from La Rioja could participate, particularly as part of the fight against trafficking in persons. The governor's interest in U.S. investment in his province is a potential avenue for greater commercial cooperation. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador Wayne met with La Rioja Governor and Peronist party member Luis Beder Herrera on October 8. The Governor was accompanied by La Rioja Province Liaison Coordinator Mariana Buratti. Poloff (notetaker) also attended.

U.S. Business in La Rioja

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador asked Governor Beder Herrera about investment in his province. The Governor replied that although the current turmoil in international financial markets made it difficult to promote investment opportunities in his province, he noted that La Rioja, with a population of 400,000, is rich in exportable products, including minerals, wine, olives, grapes, fish, and nuts. The U.S. is a destination for much of these exports, he said. He stated that La Rioja exports 95 percent of its olive production and described the province's olive valley in Chilecito as one of the best, even surpassing Spain. When asked about U.S. commercial presence in La Rioja, the Governor mistakenly referred to the UK-Dutch company Unilever as U.S.-based and noted its positive contribution. He added that the company, which has a large plant in La Rioja, provides its employees with good benefits and maintains environmentally-friendly work practices. The Governor expressed interest in attracting U.S. investment in La Rioja's rich mineral sector. The Ambassador said that the Embassy's Commercial Section could assist with this request.

U.S. Relations with Argentina

¶4. (SBU) When asked about U.S.-Argentine relations, the Ambassador cited our strong cooperation in anti-narcotrafficking and counter-terrorism and our recent joint agreements on educational exchanges, nanotechnology,

and national parks. He noted that Argentina has a strong middle class, high levels of education, and the potential to serve as an example for democratic values in the continent. He acknowledged, however, that the relationship is somewhat strained at present by the ongoing "Valijagate" trial in Miami of alleged Venezuelan agent Franklin Duran (reftels).

TIP and USG Training Programs

15. (SBU) The Ambassador noted his recent discussion with Argentine anti-trafficking activist Susana Trimarco during the Vital Voices reception on October 7. (Note: Trimarco, in her search for her daughter, who was kidnapped by traffickers in 2002 in Tucuman province, has rescued 100 women from bondage and raised public and government awareness of the crime. Trimarco's leads suggest her daughter was trafficked to La Rioja and press reports suggest her remains may be in the province. To date, these speculations have not been confirmed.) The Governor said he appreciated the USG's recognition of Trimarco, one of ten women to receive the first International Women of Courage Award in March 2007. The Ambassador added that human trafficking is a crime which knows no borders and as such requires strong international cooperation. In closing, the Ambassador highlighted the availability of U.S. training programs and seminars for La Rioja's legal and law enforcement professionals. The Ambassador noted that Argentine judges and district attorneys from Buenos Aires City, Buenos Aires province, and Cordoba province have received such training. The Governor noted that some La Rioja police personnel have attended law enforcement seminars in the United States and would welcome additional training opportunities. He said he has worked hard to improve anti-trafficking efforts by provincial law enforcement and judicial authorities.

BIO Note

16. (SBU) Of Lebanese descent, Beder Herrera was born on May 26, 1951 in Campanas, La Rioja. A lawyer by training, Herrera was elected governor in August 2007 with 42.44 percent of the vote under the electoral coalition Front for the People, beating the Victory Front's (FpV) candidate Ricardo Quintela by 15 percent of the votes. In early 2007, then vice-governor Beder Herrera encouraged impeachment proceedings on allegations of improper performance of public office against then-Governor Angel Maza, who was later impeached. Beder Herrera then replaced Maza as interim governor and called for elections. The Governor is married and has two children.

17. (SBU) Comment: The meeting provided a useful opportunity to hear the perspective of a Peronist party member outside of the capital city. The governor's interest in heightened U.S. investment in his province and his specific request to locate U.S. firms interested in mineral exploitation is a potential avenue for greater commercial cooperation.

WAYNE